

## **More on Major Govone - the Sardinian Charger**

**by Douglas Austin 02 [ TWC 23(2) p23 2005 ]**

The "*LIFE OF Edwin Laurence GODKIN*" (Vol 1. pp. 106-108) contains Godkin's reports from the Danube and the Crimea (1853-1855) which may be found in Volume 1 of Rollo Ogden's book - see pp. 21-110.

The tribute which Mr. Godkin paid to Captain Guiseppe Govone, towards the end of his own life, must close the account:-

"When we arrived at Bucharest our little company broke up, the Englishmen rejoined their regiments. The brightest, gayest, most companionable of all, Captain Govone, had already left us to throw himself into Silistria, which the Russians were besieging. Eighteen hundred men had garrisoned a small redoubt which commanded the town, and for a whole month refused to be relieved, although repulsing daily assaults of the Russians. There is not in the whole history of war, a more brilliant exploit. Daring soldiers like Govone were attracted to the scene from nearly every country in Europe. An Englishman named Butler was killed in the place. Govone headed more than one of the desperate sallies with which the Turks repulsed the Russians at the point of the bayonet. In fact, the Turkish troops, who had been rather despised since the victory over them of Mehemet Ali's Egyptians at the battle of Ez-Zahir, were beginning to reveal to the world signs of the desperate courage to be thereafter displayed at Shipka Pass and Plevna.

Govone was a thorough type of the accomplished European soldier. He was a staff officer of the German kind, learned in all the arts of his profession, and probably one of the most charming companions who ever sat around a mess-table. He went to the Crimea before the Piedmontese troops came out, as a military attache, to watch the operations. At Balaklava, he was sitting on his horse, talking to Lord Cardigan, when Captain Nolan arrived with the fatal order to charge. Govone's practised eye saw all the folly of the movement, but he thought it would be unbecoming for an officer in Piedmontese uniform to ride away from a fight. So he galloped down the slope with the Light Brigade, and had almost reached the guns when his horse was killed. When making his way back on foot under a hail of shot, an English lancer seeing the strange uniform, charged him and called on him to surrender. Govone, whose store of English was slender, had difficulty in convincing him that he was there for fun.

He returned home at the close of the campaign, "grasped the skirts of happy chance," rose steadily in rank, became a General of division, was sent as ambassador to Prussia to conclude the alliance with Italy, before the war of 1866, and served at Custozza, where his division was the only one which retired from the field with unbroken ranks. He afterwards became Minister of War. It was while he was in this position that some reflections, made in Parliament, on his administration of the office, so galled him that he committed suicide. I know nothing of the circumstances; but that he was driven to this fatal deed by anything but a morbid sensitiveness, it is impossible for any one who ever knew him to believe. My acquaintance with him in youth is among the happiest recollections of my life, and I am glad of the opportunity, even at this late period, of throwing one small flower on his grave."

Bio details I found on Google in an internet search include: male, lived (1825-72), Italian general and politician, born in Isola d'Asti, Piedmont, N Italy. He participated in the first two Independence wars, became a deputy of the right (1861-7), and helped seal the alliance with Prussia in the 3rd Independence War. He was chief of staff (1867-9) and war minister (1869-70).